

Modelling news : for those modellers considering using Digital Command Control (DCC) Peter Marriott offers 10 tips for beginners

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MODELLING NEWS

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Gaugemaster Base Unit and hand-held controller.

Explore the operating potential of DCC

As one who has “played trains” with DC for 3 decades I can confirm that operating the models with DCC is so much more fun. It might appear to be a little thing but even lights that are constant and at the whim of the operator are a real plus. You just feel that you have more control. Then there is the chance to use sound. Double heading operation is possible too. But until you have spent some time with DCC you will need to take my word for this!

Be patient

Learning about DCC is not going to take

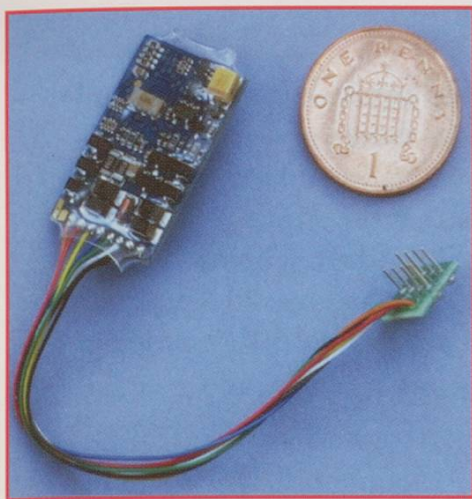
place overnight. Be determined to enjoy the learning process rather than be frustrated by it. We are all eager to run trains but on this occasion it might be better to spend time reading the manual of your chosen system to give yourself confidence that when you do begin to run trains you'll know what to expect and how to get the most out of the trains. And it really does not take that long to become DCC proficient.

You do not need to learn everything at once

Initially you can learn DCC basics such as installing the system, operating trains, turning on and off the lights and working the sound effects. Once you have mastered this you can move onto the more advanced techniques such as programming load effects in locomotives – but this is not necessary because you can just choose to use all the locomotives as they come from the manufacturer.

Before you buy a system, read DCC system manuals online

As you are deciding which DCC system to purchase it's good to look at the manufacturers websites. Many have the user manuals on the website which can be downloaded to give you an idea as to whether the system will meet your needs and one that you



Loco control chip.

think that you will be able to master without needing to refer to the manual each time you want to use the system.

Talk to friendly dealers

In an ideal world we would all have a well-stocked model railway dealer near to our home. If we are fortunate to be in this position it's good to establish a rapport with the dealer and learn from him about DCC. He may only stock one system so his knowledge may be limited to that system but some dealers specialise in DCC equipment and they may be an excellent source of "compare and contrast" advice.

Visit major model railway shows

At some of the larger model railway shows such as the BRM Doncaster, London and Peterborough there is usually a number of specialist DCC companies present. Visit their stands, try your hand at using their equipment and talk to the staff. All this knowledge will be free and you'll be nearer to making your decision as to which DCC system to buy.

Talk to DCC operators

Whilst at model railway shows or on one of the various online web forums chat to those who already have experience at operating layouts with DCC. They are usually happy to give you the benefit of their experience. Because most of these folks are not connected with any manufacturer their comments are objective and helpful. In addition it's worth reading books and magazine articles about experience with DCC. The best books tend to be those that were written recently because they cover more of the systems in circulation today.

How do you want to drive your trains?

There is one marked difference in DCC

systems – some use a speed control knob with others using buttons to control the speed. Some systems, such as the Gaugemaster Prodigy Advance 2 feature both so that the user can use whichever he prefers. Some "traditional" train operators have found that they actually quite like using button control after a while. If you intend to do a lot of shunting you may wish to purchase a DCC system that features slow speed control in addition to the usual speed control – again the Gaugemaster Prodigy Advance 2 has this system by pressing function button 6.

To sound or not to sound?

Some enthusiasts decide to "go DCC" simply because of the opportunity to run trains with sound. In the USA manufacturers retail locomotives that produce sound effects on both DC and DCC but in Europe most sound locos are for DCC. There is no doubt about it, DCC Sound is fun! It adds an extra dimension to operating model trains. You do not have to fit sound to all the locomotive fleet. The big negative is cost – these locomotives are usually twice as expensive as non-sound DC locos.

Whatever you do, enjoy DCC

Operating trains with DCC might give you some frustrating moments. After all it is a technically advanced electronics method of operating model trains. But overall the advantages of DCC far outweigh the disadvantages. Learn from any mistakes you make. On DCC web forums people are ready to give problem-solving advice when asked. See DCC as a challenge. Enjoy that challenge. You'll soon be surprised how much you know!

Sound chip and speaker.

